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U.S. Environmental Politics and Policy (2000- 2007)

Emily Gornell

April 26, 2007

There was a time in American history when the environment was a topic not regarded by partisan politics as right-wing or left-wing. The environmental movement that began making headway in the late 1960's prompted most elected officials to pay attention to the social cry for preservation, conservation and sustainability.

Environmental policy was embraced by both political parties, if not with the same enthusiasm (Kraft). Whether Republican or Democrat, the environment was an issue that all Americans could agree upon and make an effort towards improving. However, as Michael Kraft points out in his book, Environmental Policy and Politics, "the political mood of the nation has changed, as has the policy agenda".

With the birth of the environmental movement, America had begun to set a precedent for the world. Being a major power in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, America had been seen as a role model for other developed and developing nations. As we entered the millennium however, our environmental policy began to change with the entrance of a new administration and uncertainties about new scientific evidence involving implications and causes of global warming. The recent addition of such science has caused a, "striking change in environmental politics over the last three decades" (Kraft). Citizens and political parties have diverged from a common understanding of the need for environmental protection, and moved toward a strong dichotomy, containing controversial opinions which have had strong effects on policy making decisions.

Currently, global warming is at the forefront of environmental politics and policy both in America and abroad. Climate change is an issue affecting all living creatures on this planet. It is considered to be by many, "the most significant environmental problem of the 21<sup>st</sup> century", as well as a problem with no clear solution (Kraft). The world

encompassing scale of such a predicament leads to much concern over the certainty of scientific evidence, as well as the time, intensity and location of the effects. Because evidence of global warming is not as precise as many would like, it is possible at this time to not heed the warnings and continue with “business as usual”. The influence that increased legislation may have on the economy of the United States has prompted an atmosphere of weak political support for the cause in the current administration.

With the advancement of technology, the increased need for energy and the desire to boom economically, the environmental movement has met some major obstacles over the past few decades. These hurdles include multi billion dollar industries such as energy and automobile corporations. Taking on these conglomerates, corporations and institutions has proved to be a task insurmountable by the public alone. The question is what has our current administration done to provide a balance between industry and the environment, and what else needs to be done?

This research intends to explore the United States environmental predicament, while citing environmental policy of the past seven years under the George W. Bush administration. In turn, this paper will provide my audience with a background of our current policy, including the Kyoto protocol withdrawal, the Cheney Energy Task Force and the recent EPA Supreme Court decision, as well as other influences that may help shift the course of environmental action in the United States.

Throughout the 2000 Presidential Campaign, George W. Bush made clear his stance on environmental issues. He supported big business, big money, and less governmental influence in environmental arenas. During the race, he made clear his opposition to efforts such as land preservation, claiming it to be highly detrimental to

state and local interests. He also pushed, and continues to push currently, for increased national production of oil in public lands such as the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge or ANWR (Kraft). The President's goal is to decrease foreign oil dependency through increased domestic drilling projects in America's "last frontier", Alaska. Despite his energy production concerns, Bush did emphasize throughout his campaign his commitment to limiting carbon dioxide emissions. A strategy for such an undertaking was not presented during the campaign however, and with his election in 2001 this stance seemingly ceased to exist.

With a new party, the Republicans, controlling the White House as well as the Congress, environmentalists realized that their efforts would begin to be threatened by a predominantly conservative government. Immediately, they began clashing with the Bush White House and the business community over policy agenda (Kraft). Environmentalists wanted to ensure that the risk of global warming was at the forefront of political priorities.

As the new administration made itself at home, appointments were doled out for high level positions. Soon, environmental groups began to understand, if they were going to have any impact on the policy of this administration, they had their work cut out for them. All high level appointees in offices dealing with the environment and natural resources were pro business advocates who came from corporate or conservative positions; no environmentalists were named to any of these positions (Kraft). It is an overwhelming opinion among environmentalists as well as Democrats that enforcement of environmental laws has significantly declined under the Bush administration, and this

can be documented. Although it was apparent that Bush did not have a pleasing or progressive environmental agenda, he did have an agenda.

One of the first actions taken by George W. Bush was the rejection of the international climate change agreement known as the Kyoto protocol. While campaigning, he expressed a dislike for the agreement, claiming it was “fatally flawed” due to the economic impact it would have on the U.S. (Kraft). Throughout American history, government has been willing to shut down any influence that could adversely impact known American entities such as cotton, tobacco, energy and automobiles. For example, the U.S. government declared the cropping of hemp illegal in the early 1900’s due to its competitive nature to our booming cotton industry; anti-tobacco organizations have had difficulty reaching their goals due to our long history of production and export of tobacco and tobacco products. Currently, we are dealing with a similar procedure. This time, however, America is not the only country affected by our choices.

Being one of the largest producers of greenhouse gases, our actions are contributing to a global problem that can only be solved with global solutions. America it seems is caught in a tug of war between what we need to sustain our standard of living (i.e. energy), and what our children need in order for a sustainable planet to exist. The world’s nations have begun to organize and come together in an effort to reach a common goal of sustainability in many international meetings and agreements including the Kyoto Protocol. In 2001, President Bush made his choice. He backed out of Kyoto, stating that the, “reach is too short, it’s grasp too weak, and its costs too high” (Thernstrom et al).

The agreement was viewed by the administration as an international imposition on independent nations. The restrictions of the document threatened our way of life and

economy. Not only would we have to be more energy conscious, but our industries would suffer due to fossil fuel use regulations. However, this claim has never been substantiated by an analysis that would prove that reductions in greenhouse gas pollution would seriously harm the US economy (Bush Administration). In fact, an analysis that took place under the Clinton administration in 1998 stated just the opposite. The White House Council of Economic Advisors concluded that costs of implementing the Kyoto Protocol would be modest, “no more than 1/10<sup>th</sup> of one percent of the gross domestic product in 2010” (Bush Administration). The Bush administration overlooked this study, asserting the economic implications of such regulations.

There was also thought to be a lack of balance between demands for developed nations and demands for developing nations. In actuality, the convention requires all countries, including developing ones, to establish programs to address greenhouse gas emissions and to report on progress. The Kyoto Protocol asks developed nations to take the lead in limiting greenhouse gas emissions in order to set an example for the rest of the world to follow (Bush Administration). The opposing stance of the administration to this treaty began to withdraw America from its previous positions as an innovative, progressive and concerned nation. It also created a “profound rift” between the U.S. and other industrialized nations during other international meetings on climate change (Kraft). America’s withdrawing from the Protocol sent a message of indifference about increasing environmental problems.

The current administration also rejected the Rio Global Warming Treaty, also known as the Framework Convention on Climate Change, which was signed by his father George H.W. Bush and ratified by the U.S. Senate in 1992 (“Global Warming”). This

convention was intended to develop a strategy to reduce emissions to 1990 levels. One hundred and fifty nations agreed, and it seemed that the world understood its role in providing a sustainable planet for our children to inherit. By not adhering to this goal under the George W. Bush climate plan, emissions will be thirty percent over the Rio target by 2012 and rising (“Global Warming”)

In place of the Kyoto Protocol, and despite already existing evidence and research on global climate change, the Bush administration called for additional scientific research on the topic and urged U.S. companies to set “voluntary” targets for reduction of greenhouse gas emissions (Kraft). Scientists and environmentalists agree that this is not a significant step. Allowing industries to reach voluntary targets implies that it is not immediately necessary and can be circumvented easily.

During Bush’s administration, there has been a 42% increase in climate change research funding which focuses on reducing “significant uncertainties in climate science, improving global climate observing systems, and developing resources to support policy making and resource management” (Office of the Press). Environmentalists protested, considering this position to be inadequate based on available scientific evidence of the human effects on climate change. Throughout the majority of Bush’s time in the oval office, his environmental stance has remained unaltered due to skepticism about current evidence.

Many believe the continued position of scientific uncertainty is simply a wall to hide behind in order to justify not reducing emissions. Much evidence is available and clear. The National Academy of Sciences concluded: “greenhouse gases are accumulating in earth’s atmosphere as a result of human activities causing surface air

temperatures to rise... [And] large, abrupt and unwelcome changes in our climate [to occur]" ("Global Warming"). These observations were made, and presented to the government as a scientific certainty, and as a necessary concern to be addressed in policy making efforts. Also, The International Panel on Climate Change stated that the average earth temperatures could rise as much as 10 degrees over the next century, the fastest rate in 10,000 years; while the world meteorological organization recently confirmed that "temperatures are getting hotter, and they are getting hotter faster now than any time in the past" ("Global Warming"). These conclusions are shocking and eye opening to many. Scientists are animate that in order for change to occur to stop these effects, there must be a passion and a desire for change underlying any efforts. Throughout the past seven years, the Bush administration could be defined as passionate, just not about environmental protection.

The global ratification of the Kyoto protocol has been slowed down primarily due to U.S efforts to decrease its importance and ability to be implemented. Developed nations are instrumental to such a plan of action being accomplished. Without their leadership and support, all other nations cannot hope to change the path of our environmental future.

Disappointingly, the Bush administration does not have an alternative to the protocol. The White House has stated that, "the President does believe that through international processes, we can develop technologies, market-based incentives and other approaches that can combat global climate change" (Bush Administration). In fact, this is exactly what the Kyoto Protocol offers. An international solution that includes market

based initiatives and promotes cooperation in developing technologies to reduce the effects global climate change.

President Bush has been able to prevent U.S. ratification of the Protocol, but he has not made the effort needed to convince the American people that there is a better way to approach this issue. Any effort to decrease risks of global warming would be welcomed by the American people, as long as there was a sound, promising approach. The administration needs to reconsider its long standing opposition to mandatory federal greenhouse gas emissions controls which are becoming increasingly inevitable (Thernstrom et al).

In addition to this resistance to international agreements and solutions, in his first year as president, Bush developed a National Energy Task Force under the Department of Energy (DOE), headed by Vice President Cheney. Since Kyoto had been rejected, this was the administrations way of answering the call for energy concerns to be addressed while proving their dedication to research and development outside of international agreements. This task force however, has been criticized for its secrecy and its extensive consideration and input by U.S. industry leaders. Since taking office, scientists inside and outside the government have complained that “environmental policy decisions [are] being made without sufficient regard for scientific evidence” (Kraft).

Bush Senior during his administration developed a National Energy Strategy. This plan intended to hold extensive public hearing, consult with federal agencies and endorses energy conservation initiative as a core element in its recommendations (Kraft). The Energy Task Force developed by his son George W. Bush’s is a drastic contrast to his father’s policy.

As the Task Force began to develop a national energy policy, concern over the participants began to surface. It was thought by many that the Task Force had given prominence to industry representatives. These leaders were also thought to have made large contributions to the Bush-Cheney election campaign (Kraft). The claims were unsubstantiated however, because of the refusal of the Task Force to release the documentation of the meetings and conclusions developed on energy policy. Democrats in Congress as well as independent environmentalist groups and the NRDC (National Resources Defense council) tried repeatedly to force Cheney to reveal the names of the groups consulted.

Executive privilege was pleaded, and, in an unprecedented action, the investigative arm of Congress, the Government Accountability Office, sued the administration to try to get the information (Kraft). The National Resource Defense Council (NRDC) also requested the information under the Freedom of Information Act, but the administration refused to comply. NRDC filed a suit and a federal judge ordered the records to be turned over. The U.S. department of energy released 13,500 pages to the NDRC relating to previously secret proceedings of the Bush administrations Energy Task Force (“The Cheney Task Force.”).

Before turning over the records to the NRDC, however, the administration removed extensive portions of information, reminiscent of Watergate trickery. NRDC Senior Attorney, Sharon Bucci stated, “the court ruling is a wake up call for the Bush administration: it’s time to come clean about how it is doing its public business...the administrations energy plan will be revealed for what it is- a pay back to corporate pollutants”( “Federal Court Orders...”)

Once the information was available, The New

York Times concluded that the Task Force had met with, “more than 100 energy industry officials in preparing the administrations energy report but not with any representatives of environmental or consumer organizations”( Kraft)

The documents revealed that the Task Force officials sought extensive advice from utility companies and the oil, gas, coal and nuclear energy industries, and it then incorporated their recommendation, often word for word, into the energy plan (“The Cheney Task Force.”). This importance given to such industries was not in compliance with Federal Advisory Act which outlines the way in which initiatives must be advised through public and private correspondence. The records revealed that industry lobbyists and polluting corporations not only played a pivotal role in developing the energy strategy early on and often, in fact, they wrote much of it themselves(“What the Documents Reveal.”). The administration refused to disclose the names of industry participants in the Task Force or what they discussed with Bush policy makers.

The Task Force report and its recommendations seemed unbalanced and highly in favor of the energy industry. The recommendations that were released provided more subsidies to polluting industries plus more reliance on oil and nuclear power (“How NRDC...”). Although the Bush White House maintained that it was a balanced, fair document that incorporated advice from diverse interest groups, the recommendations fell short of environmental concerns and progress. It would seem that comprehensive environmental policy analysis would be impossible to accomplish without scientific evidence and initiatives. The plan called for “increases in the use of fossil fuels and nuclear energy, as well as the easing of environmental regulations which might inhibit new energy production” (Kraft). Rather than reducing demand for such energy supplies,

this plan focused much of its emphasis on increasing energy supplies for the purpose of increased industry and economic prosperity.

Due to much controversy and uproar over the lack of environmental perspective given to the Task Force, the Department of Energy (DOE) attempted to explain its actions. On March 25, the DOE released a claim that environmental organizations refused offers to provide recommendations to the Task Force, claiming it, “actively sought all viewpoints” (“Environmentalists...”). The organizations that were contacted cited that this effort was not a serious one. This claim is supported by a document released by the Task Force. It was revealed that the Task Force gave one of its staff members only 48 hours to contact 11 environmental groups to obtain policy recommendations, while Vice President Cheney and Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham met with more than 100 representatives from industry organizations over a 6 month period from January 2001 to May 2001 (“Environmentalists...”). Despite many requests by environmental groups to meet with the Task Force throughout this period, a meeting never occurred. Environmentalists requested one meeting with Spencer and another with Cheney, both requests were denied. This evidence ultimately shows the administrations lack of concern for environmental or scientific input in its energy policy.

When asked his views on conservation, Vice President Cheney replied, “It may be a sign of personal virtue, but it is not a sufficient basis for a sound, comprehensive energy policy” (Kraft,). This statement sheds much light on the values subscribed to by the Energy Task Force as well as the Bush administration as a whole. It can be said, therefore, that the participants were not present in order to determine ways to conserve, preserve and develop energy wise; the Task Force was designed to explore new ways to

increase domestic production of energy and, at the same time, allow for fossil fuel supported industries to continue production with little or no interference by the government.

In 2005, an Energy Policy Act was passed in Congress with bipartisan support. The bill was intended to support increased domestic production of oil and natural gas. It also encouraged increases in funding and incentives for renewable sources of energy such as solar, wind, ethanol and bio-diesel production. The emphasis, however, was overridingly on the expansion of fossil fuels sources, mainly in US territory, as well as nuclear power. Correlating with many of the administrations policies, there were no new requirements for improving fuel efficiency standards for cars or SUV's (Kraft).

The Environmental Protection Agency has failed to regulate automobile emissions, claiming carbon dioxide is not a proven contributor to global warming. Any new mandates to reduce of greenhouse gas emissions or requirements for utility companies to rely more on renewable power sources were not found in this legislation. On the contrary, this law actually gives federal tax credits and other subsidies to energy producers as an incentive to generate more energy in an effort to decrease foreign oil dependency (Kraft). Environmentalists rejected this bill claiming it to be excessively generous at a time of scientifically proven need to convert to alternative fuel source due to quickly depleting resources. This bill, along with many others that make their way through the legislative process in D.C., included thousands of individual pork barrel projects to ensure its passage.

However, there are some provisions of the bill which may be pleasing to environmentalists. It calls for new energy efficiency standards for federal office

buildings and programs to encourage states to develop and implement energy conservation (Kraft). This provides not only an example for state government buildings, businesses, corporations and individuals but the scale of this sudden increase in demand for energy efficient products would help fund the industry, and, in turn, bring down the cost for the average consumer. Tax deductions to consumers who purchase renewable power systems, (i.e. solar panels and hybrid vehicles), also included in the legislation, will produce a similar effect on energy efficient industries and prices.

Despite these provisions, in the 2006 State of the Union address, Bush made clear that he remained opposed to higher vehicle fuel standards or any increase in gasoline tax, the two actions most likely to have a real impact on U.S. oil consumption (Kraft). His skepticism of the science evidence plus possible threats new standards would be to the economy guide his policy and legislation recommendations.

Although much of the Bush administration's environmental policy has been overlooked due to emphasis on the War on Terror throughout his two terms in office, a recent Supreme Court decision gives hope for change and progress regardless of White House ideology.

After a string of federal court rulings regarding the administrations environmental policies, a case involving climate change policy finally reached the Supreme Court. The suits prior to this monumental case establish further proof, as Jeff Barnard of the Associated Press said, "[that] the White House regularly circumvents laws designed to protect the nations air, water, forests and endangered species" (Barnard). The decisions include: the Circuit Court of Appeals rejection of the administrations 2004 plan for balancing endangered salmon; a San Francisco ruling that tossed out new administration

laws that gave states a chance to seek more logging and other commercial projects in road-less areas, previously off limits to development; and a Seattle court ruling which cited that the administration illegally misrepresented the views of scientists when it eased logging restrictions under the Northwest Forest Plan(Barnard). The new found transparency of these issues has led to eye opening evidence of the administrations failure to take environmental problems or, more specifically, environmental law seriously.

Although carbon dioxide emissions reductions were one of the Bush campaign's promises in 2000, once elected Bush rejected recommendations of even his own EPA advisor. Eric Schaeffer, director of the Office of Regulatory Enforcement resigned his EPA position in early 2002, mentioning both, "declining enforcement actions and weakening of the Clean Air Acts new Source Review Program under the Bush administration" (Kraft). In this, he is referring to specific legislation promoted by the President, as well as suggestive interpretation of EPA's role in enforcing regulations on certain pollutants.

The Clear Skies Initiative was the first environmental legislation President Bush offered to Congress. It was drafted with the intention to control mercury, nitrogen and sulfur dioxide emissions from power plants; interestingly, it leaves out the most important and controversial pollutant, carbon dioxide (Kraft). The initiative was meant to be a replacement or revision of the already existing Clean Air Act.

The passing of this bill would have led to decreased protection and supervision of air quality and greenhouse gas emissions by not naming carbon dioxide as a pollutant as well as loosening restrictions on remaining pollutants by calling for voluntary reduction in emissions. Environmentalists asserted that the Clean Air Act, "could achieve better

results, more quickly, if properly implemented...including controls on carbon dioxide” (Kraft). The legislation is there; implementing it, however, is where our government has fallen short.

Fortunately, the Clear Skies Initiative was blocked in the U.S. Senate by a one vote margin. Senator James Jeffords, an independent from Vermont at the time of the proposal proclaimed, “We must strive to build upon the success of the Clean Air Act, not gut it... [This bill] allows giant corporate utilities to avoid compliance and stops enforcement of our existing Clean Air laws.” (Kraft). An exemplary illustration of the partisan sentiments of this controversial proposal, and U.S. environmental politics in general, can be proven by a quote from a Republican Senator from Oklahoma. Senator James Inhofe stated, “[the bill] was killed by environmental extremists who care more about ...making a political statement on carbon dioxide than they do about reducing our pollution” (Kraft). Because doubt still exists in Washington as to what is or is not a pollutant, sides are still being taken, and arguments are still being made in rejection of government involvement in industry. A bill that sought to further this discrepancy and skepticism has fortunately not have been made into law.

The shutdown of the Clear Skies Initiative did not initiate further investigation into current clean air laws and ultimately, the topic had been tabled until just this recent year. Throughout his administration, the Bush White House has consistently denied the necessity to control carbon dioxide emissions, citing that they are not specifically stated in the EPA doctrine or the Clean Air Act that carbon dioxide is a pollutant or a greenhouse gas, and, therefore, these documents give no jurisdiction to the executive branch to control this substance. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts felt differently.

In November 2006, Massachusetts, joined by New York City, the District of Columbia, Baltimore and 11 other states filed a suit to reverse EPA's 2003 decision to not regulate tailpipe emissions (Shepardson). The prosecution claimed that due to lack of carbon dioxide emissions control global warming has already begun to impact the region. Massachusetts Attorney General Tom Reilly said his state and others are rapidly losing shoreline and gaining smog because of unchecked global warming (Totenberg). This brought the issue of global warming to the Supreme Court. The Court's decision is crucial to environmental policy, action, and to setting a precedent for future policies to come. On the topic of whether the courts should be involved at all in such a sensitive, unexplored and unprecedented case, the members of Supreme Court were divided.

In a 5-4 decision in *Massachusetts v. Environmental Protection Agency*, on April 2, 2007, the U.S. Supreme Court, "rejected EPA's position that it does not have the authority under the Clean Air Act to regulate greenhouse gas emissions for new motor vehicles"( Strohbehn et al). Contrary to the EPA's position, federal law does delegate this power specifically to the EPA and no other agency. The decision to decline the exercising of this power is precisely what the agency is being held responsible for (Kilpatrick). The question is whether the executive branch can legally refuse to regulate carbon emissions when the Clean Air Act specifically mandates regulations of, "all pollutants that may endanger public health or welfare, including effects on climate and weather" (Totenberg). Consistent scientific evidence holds carbon emissions to be included in this category. The Supreme Court skeptically told the EPA that if they were able to provide evidence that greenhouse gases, expressly carbon dioxide emissions, do not contribute to climate change, then and only then would the EPA be able to refuse

regulations of such gases. However, the Court did conclude that the EPA offered no reasonable explanation for its refusal to create regulations or determine whether greenhouse gas is the cause or contributor to climate change. During the hearings, Justice Paul Stevens observed that the administration had selectively edited quotes from a key scientific report indicating that there is more certainty on the correlation between greenhouse gases and global warming than the administration claims there to be (Totenberg). Prior to this case, enforcement of environmental laws had been largely overlooked by the American people and media. It is important for governmental actions to be closely monitored by the public and its citizens. Nevertheless, as Prosecutor Tom Reilly stated, “It’s unfortunate that Massachusetts and other states had to be here today to for the EPA and the administration to do its job” (Totenberg).

The decision may prompt the U.S. Congress to act more quickly to pass legislation addressing climate change. The Clean Air Act does not currently provide concise guidance on approaches to climate change. Therefore, Congress must begin to develop comprehensive energy and climate change legislation with the help and input of concerned scientists and environmentalists. Along with bringing the topic of global warming to a head with the federal government, this case has also given the topic more prominence and coverage in the public sphere, and it has allowed for increased state confidence to forge ahead with their energy efficient endeavors.

The Northeast and West have been consistently congratulated for their commitment to energy efficiency compared to other regions of our nation. With the Supreme Court ruling, California has jumped on the decision’s coat tails. The state has petitioned the federal government for a waiver under the Clean Air Act that would give

California the ability to dramatically reduce tailpipe emissions in the coming decade. They propose to reach such a goal by requiring automakers to have averages of more than 40 miles per gallon (Shepardson). This sort of state legislation, if permissible by the federal government, could extensively impact the U.S. auto market nationwide. In an attempt to prove to the federal government the states desire and support of such legislation, ten other states are following California's lead.

In addition to state leadership, national laboratories as well as councils and organizations devoted to clean energy and the reduction of global warming effects have researched and developed promising ways in which goals can be reached and progress can be made. Studies by five prominent national energy laboratories found that market based, energy efficiency policies could reduce the nation's energy needs by a third through 2010 (Kraft). This means simply marketing already existing clean energy technology to the everyday consumer and business owner. This alone would put the U.S. on a track of environmental stability and sustainability. The NRDC, a group devoted to energy efficiency, use of clean natural gas and decreased oil and coal dependence, developed an energy plan to challenge the Bush administrations energy policy titled, "A Responsible Energy Policy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" (Kraft). These outside studies and blueprints would be useful in helping develop comprehensive policy decisions for the reduction of global warming effects.

In the past seven years, other nations throughout the world have risen above the United States to become global leaders on energy conservation and climate change legislation. An extraordinary case of foreign environmental efforts is the nation of Brazil, whose energy is almost completely supported by the sugar crop. Sugar is used in

the production of ethanol, a renewable, environmentally friendly fuel. The production of sugar cane-based ethanol is expected to reach an all-time high this year. In 2004, flex-fuel vehicles, cars that run on either ethanol or gasoline, were introduced to the Brazilian market (Reel). In just three years, the demand for these cars boomed, showing Brazilian citizen and government support for energy efficiency. Excitingly, automakers announced that they predict to solely produce these vehicles by the end of 2007, eliminating gas-only automobiles from their economy all together (Reel). This is a remarkable turning point in conservation. By reaching this goal, Brazil has proven to the world that something can be done about our excessive use of undeniable resources. Setting an example of change is an important thing Brazil has done. The sharing of their technology, knowledge and resources will surely benefit all other nations who wish to take on similar endeavors.

Another example of environmental efforts can be found in the Sydney, Australia. On March 31, 2007, business and homeowners switched off the lights to draw attention to the seriousness of global warming. Four million people turned off their lights for one hour in an event organized by environmentalists and by Sydney city officials, the New South Wales state government and thousands of businesses. This campaign was meant to encourage residents to conserve energy by turning off lights, computers and other electrical equipment when they are not being used. These steps, officials say, could cut Sydney's greenhouse gas emissions by 5 percent a year ("Sydney Goes Dark..."). Australia is not alone with this innovative idea. In February, Paris turned off the lights for 5 minutes in a similar gesture that persuaded other cities in Europe such as Rome and Athens to do the same. Events like this that bring awareness to the need for change are

necessary in fostering support for action and ultimately legislation, whether international, national, or local.

Other nations have become increasingly concerned and vigilant regarding environmental issues while the United States seems to be increasingly concerned about other issues, mainly our national economy and the War on Terror. However, global and domestic influences are beginning to change our path down an oil addicted road. Kraft makes a good observation when he points out;

“Whether the U.S. public will continue to support the President’s environmental initiatives depends on the way the media covers the issues, how effective environmental groups are in opposing Bush and the extent to which the Democrats are able to elevate environmental issues to a higher status on the political agenda”.

Since gaining the majority in both the House and the Senate, the Democrats have asserted their commitment to the environment, but solid legislation has yet to surface. Media coverage is also an integral part of ensuring this issue gets to and stays at the top of the public agenda, which will result in its inclusion on the political agenda. With the shocking realization of the depletion of fossil fuels, a search for renewable energy has begun, but no clear cut decisions as to which direction the U.S. should take. A conversion to sustainable energy remains the long term goal of the environmental community. Such a transition is possible with a well designed public policy and political leadership to get them enacted and implemented.

With the international acceptance of the Kyoto protocol, the recent UN report on the existence and causes of trends in global warming, and the security issues inherent

with long term dependency on imported oil, policymakers have a renewed commitment to sustainable environmental practices. It imperative, however, that these efforts are made to enhance the health of well-being of human society, regardless of the corporate threats they represent. As a famous environmentalist once said, “We face a future confronted only by insurmountable opportunities. The many crises facing us should be seen, then, not as threats, but as chances to remake the future so it serves all beings”. The opportunity for environmental reform and the process to transition from a culture of consumption and waste to a sustainable society will require an inter-generational focus and a significant departure from the corporate status quo.

As environmental movements forge forward, the American government must do its part. Our government must begin to realize that this not an issue effecting only the United States. It is a concern for all living creatures across the globe. Actions that America takes or doesn't take have their effects on the other nations of the world both immediately and eminently. This is not a time for selfishness, much less a time for greed. Now is when we need to come together as humans, and recognize what the Native Americans did a long time ago, “We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children”. May we all acknowledge the wisdom of this ancient proverb and remember it in our pursuit of environmental protection and sustainability.

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